Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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"'If that good book do not exist, I give this as the excuse for mine, that it at least can claim the advantage of existing. Without false modesty, I assure you that it is most imperfect, very far from my ideal. Will you help me to make it better? Write down your criticisms, make a note of things I have omitted, suggest alterations and post them all to me. I will be sincerely thankful, and promise that each new edition, thanks to co-operators like yourself, will be a little better than the last.'

"Such, my dear niece, is the way in which I should like to see this little volume received and made use of by its natural readers. If they receive it in this spirit, I shall be more proud of it than of a novel sold a hundred thousand times."

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The letters themselves are charming: not only on account of their matter and form, but also because they give us a French view of questions in which all parents are so deeply interested. The French are perhaps looked upon by the present generation as somewhat behind-hand as regards the education of women: a rash conclusion; for we must not forget that it is the country that gave birth to the "grandes dames."

This present volume proves how eager is the French mind to grapple with the new order of things and to discover the best means of turning new customs to good account. M. Prévost distrusts Frenchmen who want their daughters to behave like English or American girls. The right course to adopt is one of independence. Foreign ways *can* teach: but each nation has its own individuality, and France, perhaps, as much as any other country. The chief interest of these letters lies then, in my opinion, not so much in the style and subject as in the explanation of the way in which a French thinker proposes to make use of the sweeping reforms that have taken place in recent years with respect to the education of girls.

THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

By Robert Bird,

Author of "Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth," "Paul of Tarsus," etc.

(*Continued from page 257.*)

The Life of Jesus.

In telling our children the story of the life of Jesus, we must not limit ourselves to the bare words of Scripture, or the pictures of early childhood, which interest a child most, would be few and meagre. He must understand that Jesus was once a little child like himself. Children sing about it in their hymns, and they should hear of it from their mothers' lips. There is much encouragement in knowing that as Jesus was a holy child, so must he try to be.

I have spoken of our children wearing the attributes of God, of love and peace and truth. How was it with the infant Christ? The record of His early years is in these words, "The child grew and waxed strong, becoming filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." His whole life is our example, and there is nothing in these simple words to bar out the hope that you too may see your boy filling with wisdom and being clothed with the peace of God as the years pass.

But what is this wisdom with which the child Jesus was filled? And may our children partake of it? It is not far from any one of us. The knowledge of God is the beginning of wisdom. And your child will grow in this knowledge by God's influence guiding him toward goodness; and seeing attributes of God taking shape and life in his father's house, God will then no longer be only a name to him, but a living power, swaying his parents, who are the instruments of God for revealing His nature. Was ever a prophet or priest dowered with a sweeter duty or a higher

call? And thus will the child learn from his parents that they sincerely believe what they tell him about God, and that with their whole heart they try to follow Him.

Be not discouraged.

While these are the simple things to be taught, we must not be discouraged if our children do not take hold of them as we should wish. We plant, God gives the increase. The heart is known to Him alone, and what may look like failure to us may be something very different.

How then can you best teach your child all about the life of Jesus? It is not difficult, for *there is an inspiration in it which unites with the holiness of God in your child, and as he listens, he believes and loves.* The children of the Perea, when they saw Him and heard Him speak, believed what He said; and your children will believe also when you present Him in a story, and as they hear His sayings from their mothers' lips, lips which they have learned to believe are the fountains of truth and love. We must remember that we are speaking to a little citizen of His kingdom, in whose mind there is no doubt. There were people who looked upon Jesus as a liar and an impostor, but these were ecclesiastics and not children.

Tell your child about the love of Jesus for little children and of His defence of them, "Whoever gives a cup of water to one of these little ones that believes in Me, gives it to Me." Tell him how the little children in the Temple cheered Him and would not stop, and that he refused to chide them. Tell him that Jesus loves the praise of little children more than that of grown men. He loves them so much that He is called the Friend of little children. Let him hear His call to them to come into His arms as surely and as truly as ever the boy in the fisherman's cot, or the children on the Perean road, or Christ's own brothers and sisters at Nazareth ever heard it, and God in Jesus will bless your child.

The third stage.

Having passed through infancy and childhood, we come to the stage when the child has reached years of discretion, and is to be taught by the example of his parents, by the story of the life of Christ, and by having Christ's sayings and example impressed upon him.

Beginning with the innocence of childhood, the birth gift of God, you have nourished your child's spirit by example and conversation and have seen him grow in wisdom with the grace of God upon him, and he believes in God and Jesus as sincerely as he believes in his own father and mother. But his passions are slumbering, and he is only looking out of windows at the world. As his will becomes stronger, his reason must be satisfied, with fuller knowledge of God, and of that wisdom from on high which is to be more powerful within him than anything that is in the world; his guide and comforter, his refuge and strength during long years of responsibility. And how better can you do this than by placing before him in all His rich colours the Example of living wisdom, walking, not upon the mountain tops apart from men, but in the lowly valleys, through the cornfields, and among the fishing villages, calling upon men to believe His words and follow Him,—the figure of the Son of God, the Saviour of men, who bent over a carpenter's bench at Nazareth.

The sayings of Jesus.

A few of the sayings of Jesus are incomprehensible, but most of them are easy to be understood, for they were intended for the poor and the illiterate, very few of whom could read and write. They could follow a story, although they could not understand an argument, and hailed His teaching as simple compared with their old teachers, and they thronged about Him, and many believed Him gladly. His teaching is easy still, and still the common people, the uneducated and the children have no difficulty in understanding His words, although they have great difficulty in understanding His interpreters and commentators. *His person is not hedged about with intellectual forms and theological fences*, for He moves freely everywhere. He was not afraid of being touched by the common people, as the other religious teachers were. He went about the country proclaiming that heaven was near, that it was in their village, was passing their door. He came to break down the fence and remove the difficulties of the theology of 1900 years ago. He is in the midst of us still and is doing it now. He came to make simple the way of salvation to the crowds of common

folk. Is He doing it now? Nineteen hundred years ago the Scribes had put a maze of hedges before the gate of heaven, of rules, definitions, traditions and laws, dating back for hundreds of years, and they enjoyed the intellectual pleasure of threading these mazes. These thorns and briars, choking the truth, Jesus burnt up, leaving no longer any fence, but an open way between God and man. He told the people to follow Him to the home of His Father. But, as might be expected during these 1900 years, the Scribes have raised fresh mazes, raising them in His name, until His figure is almost lost among them. But these too must disappear, if the little children and the common people are to enter in.

Jesus called upon the men of His day to turn from the interpreters of God to God Himself, and I would invite you to turn from Christ's interpreters to Christ Himself, in the first place, so that your children may be nourished upon plain and simple things before stronger food is offered to them. I wish the child to lay hold on the life and sayings of Jesus. That is enough for him, and he may find in later life that it is enough for a man also.

The sum of saving knowledge.

Some 250 years ago when the Bible was not so well understood as it is to-day, the Scottish theologians drew up a document, and called it "The sum of saving knowledge," but time has shown that the life and sayings of Jesus are more worthy of the name. They are the true gold of the world, the seed springing up into everlasting life. Short readings of Scripture, or instruction on Sundays only, or the teaching of the Sunday School or the Church, are not sufficient to make Jesus the elder brother of your children. He must be the familiar companion of their every-day life, whose sayings have not a distant pulpit ring about them, but wear the conversational tone of the parents' voice. If any parent thinks he has not time to see to this, then a great responsibility rests upon him.

The ruling influence in the life of Jesus was His obedience to the will of His Father, and that must be the ruling influence in your child if he is to follow His example. With God enlightening his conscience, a God and Father in Heaven in whose love he has learned to trust, he has a sure guide to

do the right and avoid the wrong. This is the teaching of Jesus, and it is simple and sufficient. Complexity in religion means theology, and theology lives upon metaphysics, logic, argument and definitions, things difficult to grown-up persons and incomprehensible to a child.

Useless Theology.

There is much useless theology in the world. Let us look for instance at the doctrine of original sin — that every little child lies under the wrath of God for something which he did not do. What is its history? According to one text book, because of what Adam did so long ago, "Every child born into the world deserves God's wrath and damnation." According to another, "Every child is wholly inclined to evil and that continually." Now this curse runs so contrary to the love of God, that *we should expect to find it specified with the utmost clearness in the Bible, but it is not.* We read that God cursed the serpent, that He told Eve her sorrows would be multiplied, and Adam that the ground would be cursed for his sake, and that he would eat bread by the sweat of his brow, that dust he was, and unto dust he would return; but *there is nothing about every child born into the world deserving damnation.* It was left to theology to put that awful meaning into words of another sense. We must not forget this, for nine-tenths of theology is built upon that foundation of sand.

The Ten Commandments.

But to pass on. The ten commandments and the statutes of Moses are supposed to set forth the religion of God before the time of Christ, yet *they contain no hint of this theory of original sin.* We read of sacrifices, offerings and atonements, for sins committed during life, but not a word about seeking forgiveness for sins committed by others before we were born.

When Jesus was a child.

We pass on for a thousand years, to the time of Jesus, and find that the idea of original sin was then unknown, for the Bible did not contain it and the Rabbis did not teach it.

We turn next to the sayings of Jesus, and search there for the theory of original sin, for it must stand or fall with Him. If

He proclaimed it to mankind, it passes into our Christianity. If He did not, that ends the matter.

But there is nothing in the sayings of Jesus imputing original sin to children, and there is much imputing innocence and holiness to them, and this thought draws a line of limitation across the ages at his great name. The theory is not Christ's, but the work of a much later time.

Theology is unnecessary for your children, and no man would lead them out into that deep sea if it could be avoided, and it can be, by looking to Christ and following Him. The warnings of Paul are warnings to us all. "Shun foolish questionings and genealogies and strifes and fightings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain." The Rabbis surrounded the laws of Moses with 10,000 rules and explanations, but the teaching of Jesus requires none of these.

Rules of Worship and Church Government.

When your child grows up, he may take an interest in theology or he may not. The knowledge of God and of Jesus which he learned at his mother's knee may be sufficient, and happy for him if it is so, for he will be saved many a conflict, many a doubt. When he comes to consider the subject of Church Government and Rules for Public Worship, he may build upon your foundation a structure of the pattern of one sect or of another, but the foundation will ever be more important to him than the structure upon it. If you think otherwise of the confessions and catechisms of the various sects of Christianity, I would like you to glance at the Thirty-nine Articles and the Catechism, and ask yourself whether the words of Jesus are not better for a child. I have never met a man who could understand these church standards, much less get a child to understand them. In ten lines of the Confession of Faith, fifty propositions regarding God may be found.

When does Sin begin?

According to the ecclesiastical text book, sin is "Any want of conformity to, or transgression of any law of God given as a rule to the reasonable creature." A child of tender years is a cipher under the civic law of our country and so it is before his Father in Heaven, until he can discern good from evil with a reasonable and responsible intelligence.

We read that the child Jesus was obedient to his parents, and we must encourage our children to obey us. The sincerity of their service we can never know, but we can trust them, for distrust yields bitter fruit. One mistake in disbelieving a truthful child is worse than ten mistakes in believing the untruthful.

What is our aim?

Let us never lose sight of our aim, *to teach our children in the simplest and surest way possible, how to know and obey God, how to be good.* The training of Timothy is commended in these words, "From a child thou has known the holy writings, which are able to make wise unto salvation." If this was said by Paul of the books of the Old Testament, how much more may it be said of those wonderful records by the four Evangelists, of the life and sayings of Jesus, so varied, and yet so uniform. We are told that this knowledge "makes wise." What is this wisdom? for it certainly is not literary, artistic, commercial, scientific, or even theological wisdom. It is plain wisdom, within the reach of plain people and their children, the wisdom of righteousness or right doing.

The knowledge of the life and sayings of Jesus is of more value to our children than all the articles, creeds, catechisms, and confessions that ever were written. *Let us teach our children the Christianity of Christ as He left it*, not as it has been beaten out by thousands of busy hammers, and we shall have imparted to them the secret of right living. Christ's hatred of evil, will lead our children to hate it, His scorn of the rules of men taking the place of the commands of God will lead them to scorn them also, and the love of Jesus for all mankind will make them love their neighbour, until their hearts beat with the compassion of their Saviour.

Believing in Jesus.

When you ask your child if he believes in Jesus, he will answer with a simple "yes," in which is hid the meaning of Peter's answer, "Yes, Lord, I believe, for Thou alone hast the words of everlasting life."

Let your question have no subtlety under it. Jesus did not ask the people gathered about Him, if they *believed He had*

come from God to be killed to take away original sin caused by Adam's fall. Strange to say the words "Sacrifice," "Guilt," "Reconcile," "Atone," are not to be found in His vocabulary. He did not ask them if they believed in any doctrine, but if they *believed in Him, a person.* He only asked for the belief of a little child, and they would find the door of His Kingdom open.

What is believing?

What does Jesus mean by believing in Him? for that must not be left in doubt. To answer this question we go to the Fountain-head, and consider His own words. He used plain language to plain people, and its common meaning was its true meaning. "You believe in God," He said, "believe also in Me." He asked only for the simple belief which a child has in a father, which a brother has in his brother, which a husband has in his wife. *Just in the same way that these people believed in anything, they were to believe in Him.* "Whosoever believes in Me shall have everlasting life." At the Last Supper, His disciples exclaimed, "Thou knowest everything and by this we believe that Thou camest out from God." "Do you now believe?" was His reply. Believe that He came from God, was what He asked.

There is the scene with the beggar in the streets of Jerusalem, who was seeking for Jesus.

"Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" Jesus asked.

"And who is He, Master, that I may believe in Him?"

"Thou hast seen Him," was the reply, "and it is He that speaketh to thee now."

"Lord, I believe!" was the answer.

There is no better teacher.

There is no better teacher of Christianity than Jesus Himself, unaided by any other, and by familiarity with His life and sayings, your child will early come to believe in Him, and to have faith in what He says. Your child does not doubt this saying of Jesus, "If anyone loves Me, he will obey Me, and we will dwell with him." He believes it and knows it, for it is his daily experience. He is not left in confusion and despair as to what he should do and what avoid. He has heard his Saviour say, "I am the Light of life," and he

believes it as sincerely as that the sun is the light of the heavens; he believes it because he has that light guiding him, and knows no other light.

In considering the mind of Christ in relation to children, we must not forget His warnings. It is apparent that children may be made to stumble, and He says that those who cause it deserve to be drowned. And our duty is to so fortify our children that they may understand the conditions of their citizenship, knowing that the door of the fold is never shut for straying lambs to return with repentance in their hearts. And whilst the child is told that he will often be tempted to take his own will and be selfish, and not obey the will of God, he must also equally know that for sincere sorrow and determination to do right there is ever pardon with the Father.

The one foundation.

You have now laid the foundation of your child's life, laid it upon the rock Christ Jesus, and nothing else greatly matters. If that foundation goes, everything goes; if that foundation remains, all else may go. He will have creeds and rules, forms and ceremonies presented to him, and will be able to study them with intelligent equanimity. The building that he may rear upon the simple faith of his childhood may be church or chapel, it will be a life spent in striving after the pattern of his Master, and it cannot fail in being a life well pleasing to God.

Christianity is Christ's method of knowing and obeying God, of being good. It is the attitude of a child to a father. "My Father in Heaven, and your Father in Heaven," are His manner of speaking of God. Thus He brought God very near to us, teaching us how to pray in few and simple words, commencing "Our Father which art in Heaven," and he warned us against long prayers. He taught us to have faith in the guidance of God, and to obey that guidance. He gave us a message from God that if we did evil and repented and sought forgiveness, we should be forgiven, and that the truth and sincerity of our repentance was known to God alone. Our only way to know a good man is not by his theories and professions, but by his good fruits, and that every man will be weighed, not for calling Him Lord and professing faith in Him, but by good words and good deeds.

What more is wanted?

Having taught your child to see God in and through Jesus, what more is there to teach? The ear of his Father in Heaven is open to him and his heart is open to His heavenly guidance; he sees God face to face, and whether he be in the market or the church, on the moor or in the crowded city, he has a temple to worship in, he has an hour of prayer at any hour.

Let him lay hold on religion, the religion of Jesus, and leave theology to those who have time and taste for it. It was not necessary for the peasantry of Galilee and it is not necessary for your child. Vast fields of speculation and controversy spread around him, libraries of books look down on him. The theories of the early centuries are crossed by the theories of a later age, the theories of Roman Catholic Christianity are crossed by the theories of Protestant Christianity, and the theories of 300 years ago when the Thirty-nine Articles were framed are crossed by the theories of to-day. One thing, however, has not changed, for they all hold it alike, that Jesus is the great example for all men to follow, the Son of God, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that all who follow Him and believe in Him will have Heaven, for He said it.

What is faith in Jesus but faith in His way, His truth and His life? These are the things that save from sin. The words of Jesus are, "God loves you because you love Me, and believe that I came from God."

Not wrath and anger, but love is the attitude of God towards your child. Love is the foundation of faith. If we do not love we cannot believe, and if we do not believe we cannot love. The love which we have towards one another is the love which we have towards God; "As I have loved you, so love ye one another," are the words of Jesus. *There are not two kinds of love.* Jesus has made that clear, "He that would love Me must love his brother also." And so with our faith in Jesus. It is to be of that substantial kind which makes us say we have faith in an honest man. It is faith sincere and whole-hearted, the faith of a child. Jesus asks no more, and He will accept no less than the heart-trust of a child. Your child's simple faith unites him with

God, and having this he will have little to learn and nothing to unlearn when he grows up. This is the one thing needful, God in his conscience dwelling with him and saving him as Jesus saved.

So long as men fail to see in childhood what Jesus saw, so long as they fail to make faith in Jesus the simple thing which Jesus made it to these children of Galilee, so long will they be found like the Scribes of old hiding the key and barring the door of the Kingdom, neither going in themselves, nor letting others in. But when men look on children as Jesus looked on them, as they stood at a distance in the yellow dust of the Perean road, scared and held back, then will they understand the divine anger against anyone, then or now, who would despise or offend them, or put a cause of stumbling in their way; then will they feel the tenderness and the rebuke of the heart that drew them into His Kingdom with the arms of love. And the mothers of to-day who hold up their children's hands to Jesus, and lead their feet to Him as the mothers did of old, may know, and that of a surety, whatever men may say, Jesus will not turn them away, nor deny to them what He so freely gave to all who came to Him, when He walked the paths of this world.